

to this morbid still life, a true *nature morte*. Her bravado shocked Frogue editor de Brunhoff and scandalized Horst. What Man made of her dark humor—a reply in Surrealist terms to his obsessive focus on her body?—is not recorded.

Despite her provocative lapse in taste, de Brunhoff encouraged Lee to work as a photographer. Soon she was taking Huene's place in the studio on minor assignments. New York *Vogue* published her Steichenesque shots of luxury items arranged like miniature still lifes. To set off Chanel's new perfumes, she arranged their glass bottles with several modernist props: African masks, bits of classical architecture, a chessboard that might have come from Man's studio. In the most original of this group, a silhouetted hand reaches toward the flacons of Patou's perfume bar, whose essences let the owner concoct her own scent. The caption for Lee's shot of Elizabeth Arden's new perfume—"l'Elan d'Elizabeth, which blends sweet and spicy"—may have seemed like another "howl." One can imagine her pride when images of Patou gowns such as she had modeled ran in the magazine above the credit "Lee Miller, Paris."

Frogue provided relief from the intensity of life with Man. De Brunhoff, a portly, talkative tease whose brother created the *Babar* series, was also a trained actor. His dramatic flair convulsed his collaborators, especially when he did one-man renditions of silent movies—acting all the parts while quivering uncontrollably to indicate the flickers. De Brunhoff was "a brilliant mime," a friend recalled; "he could act a feature as well as draw it; and over his squat little body he would cunningly twist the lapel of his ill-fitting jacket to indicate the subtlest new line." De Brunhoff considered Lee a kindred spirit, whose sense of the ridiculous matched his own.

One could say that Lee's feel for the incongruities of daily life made her a Surrealist, though she never joined the movement and no doubt laughed in private at Breton's pomposity. Too pragmatically American to adopt his view of photography as a path into the unconscious, she nonetheless sympathized with the Surrealists' wish to shock society by whatever means possible. Even as an apprentice, she had an eye for unsettling moments and used the camera's framing capacity to capture and re-present them. Her knowledge of art, drama, and lighting came together in the unstudied Surrealism of her early Paris images—a mature body of work for a young photographer. Having trained with the masters—Steichen, Huene, Man Ray—she had absorbed their authority along with their "personalities."

By 1930, when Man had abandoned his flirtation with Paris as a subject, other photographers—André Kertész, Germaine Krull, Ilse Bing, Brassai—were documenting its street life in the spirit of their common precursor, Atget. Like them, Lee walked around the city looking for scenes that spoke of their own accord. Working out of doors with a simple viewfinder gave her the freedom to capture the unexpected. In some of her earliest images, odd angles accentuate the humor implicit in the scene. In one, a canted vision marks her

delight at spotting four small rats seated side by side with their tails draped over their narrow perch. In another "found" image, three painted carousel cows eye the camera as they rise, fall, and spin by: her composition leads the eye past these tethered creatures to a patch of sky—the beyond to which they will never escape.

The urban landscape yielded many surprises. In a tilted image of a man standing near a swatch of asphalt, the bottom of his legs and his shoes (all that is seen of him) seem to be endangered by the encroaching substance. Lee's handling of light and texture—dull fabric, shiny leather, hard pavement, viscous asphalt—turns an ordinary street scene into a quirky view of the shrinking interval between human and nonhuman. Another arresting image called *Exploding Hand*—one of a series of hands standing in for faces—illustrates Breton's idea of "convulsive beauty." As a woman reaches toward a glass door marked by a tracery of scratches, her hand seems to explode just before its manicured fingers grasp the knob; the tilt of the door, a natural frame inside the picture, heightens the drama. Having mastered the camera's framing capacity, Lee used it—less programmatically than some official Surrealists—to enhance the strangeness in the everyday.

Other images from this period play with presence and absence. In one, the idea of something missing is implied by a silhouetted hand reaching toward an almost abstract pattern of grillwork. In another, of birds in cages, the alternation of the cages' bell-shaped wires and the spaces between them suggests ideas of escape. An implicit irony or dark humor—one of her persistent notes—emerges when we see that the birds are shot against patterned grillwork that imitates their natural habitat, the forest, in its leafy curves. Similarly, a pair of wooden shoes found on a patch of earth imply the marginality of their absent owner. In an image that harks back to Atget, Lee photographed the entrance to Guerlain's headquarters on the oblique, as if looking askance at the luxury trade to focus instead on the trees reflected in the plate-glass window. With each of these shots, familiar scenes and objects are made new by re-presenting them at odd angles.

Given Lee's apprenticeship in the arts of vision, her approach to photography as "a mechanical refinement of the art of perspective" is not surprising. She had studied perspective, lighting, and composition with the best; she knew how to compose the image in her mind's eye, turn the lens in relation to the scene, and let the play among shapes speak for itself. Her sense of subjects positioned relationally in space aligns her with other modernists for whom "one of photography's fascinations has been to propose psychological connections between forms and figures in space." The gaps between the shapes defined by the varieties of grillwork in her Paris photographs, for instance, attest to her feel for spatiality—both the shifting dynamics of inside and outside, and the gaps between figures in relationship.

One wonders how Man responded to Lee's outdoor shots, found as she

strolled around Paris in search of surprises. She may have reflected on the difference between working outside and in the studio's controlled atmosphere while printing Man's portraits, including the many studies of her own person. Perhaps the relative absence of the human figure in her early work (hands and feet stand in for bodies) was not accidental. Photographing the nonpersonal, the other-than-human, would have offered relief from Man's use of her as his material, just as controlling the distance, angle, and composition may have reversed feelings of complicity she experienced as his subject at a time when she was struggling to establish herself.

Their discovery of a mysterious technique in some ways illustrates their symbiotic, yet conflicted, relationship. While printing one day in the tiny darkroom, Lee turned on the light, forgetting that twelve negatives—nude studies of a sensational blond singer named Suzy Solidor—hung in the developing tank. Fearing that the work was ruined, she turned off the light and called Man, who barely curbed his anger. Since it was impossible to redo the session, Mlle. Solidor having left Paris, they plunged the negatives into the developer to see what would happen.

The result, a partial reversal of the blacks and whites, was startling. A delicate line detached Suzy's torso from the rest of the image. "The unexposed parts of the negative, which had been the black background, had been exposed by this sharp light," Lee recalled, "and they had developed, and come right up to the edge of the white, nude body." It was the first example of what she and Man would call "solarization"—a tribute to the charms of Mlle. Solidor (whose name means "sun giver") and a code name for their discovery. In the controlled experiments that followed, they exposed negatives for different lengths of time "so that you wouldn't lose too much of the goings-on in the shadow," Lee said, "or have the hair come out all despondent and gray . . . or melting." In time, they worked out how much overexposure was needed and learned to use "this quality of melting to enhance or give volume to the images." Yet solarization remained chiefly a matter of chance.

Once one gave up the idea of control, knowing that each solarization would turn out differently could be seen as an advantage. "You wanted to get different effects," Lee explained, and the approach suited some subjects more than others. In Man's 1930 portrait of Duchamp, one of a series of solarized portraits of artists, the fine line chiseling his friend's profile alludes to Duchamp's skill as a draftsman. "But somebody else's profile who was just as good-looking might have been completely coarsened by the technique," Lee remarked. Solarization worked according to its own laws. And despite Man's gradual mastery of it, material reality kept reasserting itself in the form of accidents, some more pleasing than others.

The female body could be approached afresh from this perspective. The subtle "goings-on" in the shadows, the "melting" quality enhancing its vol-



Lee solarized, c. 1930 (Man Ray)

umes, gave the nude greater dimensionality, and the silvery aura emanating from the body externalized its inner life. One day Lee and Man photographed a naked model as if she were asleep in midair, then solarized the result. The print's floating quality became emblematic to the Surrealists, who courted such states of being. Man's title, *Primat de la matière sur la pensée*, gives primacy to matter over thought—perhaps an ironic gesture since the solarized line surrounds and contains the naked body. It was the sort of joke that develops in intimacy. Decades later, Lee wondered which of them should take credit for the image. "I don't know if I did it but that doesn't matter," she remarked. "We were almost the same person when we were working."

In the next few years, as Man used solarization to turn bodies into dream anatomies, Lee remained his favorite subject. The technique stood for her presence in his life. His inclusion of her solarized profile in his autobiography, *Self Portrait*, connects her to the rebirth of creative energy he experienced in the 1930s, when solarization was hailed as an invention that elevated photography to fine art. In this famous image, her "good" profile is delineated by a black line that softens as it moves out from her body, paradoxically suggesting both the emanation of her energy and its containment. "In either case," notes a critic, "her body and the solarization process join forces here with the result that Miller's flesh becomes essential to the rhetoric of Man Ray's invention."

If her body was essential to his creative vision, Lee's lips remained an emblem of her power. Greatly magnified and on their own in another solarization, they pursued him, Man wrote, "like a dream remembered." The image held still other meanings: lovers entwined, but also the engorged genital lips. One wonders to what extent Lee, whose sexual repartee was often vulgar, accepted Man's view of her—whether she saw such images as erotic puns or as the latest version of familiar desires. (Or both?) Her solarized portrait of Man shaving wittily compares his sudsy profile with her own, and in the process, dissolves the pose's allusions to high art: the head turned as in Renaissance portraiture of notables. Here the noted photographer is trying to remove the traces of masculinity, her portrait suggests—pulling his (invisible) leg in a good-natured manner.

The enlargement of detail expanded the possibilities of photography, Man believed, by loosening the medium's ties to realism. What he did not say was that it also allowed him to explore his obsessions. *Photographs by Man Ray*, his 1934 retrospective in book form, includes a solarized image of calla lilies, one of several taken while living with Lee. The lilies' formal beauty is enhanced by the artificial light and the process of solarization: isolated on a pale background, the lilies resemble so many white, nude bodies. It does not take much imagination to see in the form of the pistil emerging from the flower another sexual metaphor, nor is the French word for lily (*lys*, to an American ear pronounced like *Lee's*) coincidental. Like the image of her lips, Man's lilies spoke

covertly of his desire—of the fusion of energies he simultaneously feared and yearned for.

What Lee made of this photo one can only guess. Horst's portrait of her holding a sprig of lily of the valley had made her laugh. Man's allusions to her in the calla lily series may have given her pause. Much later, she recalled that in the process of solarization, "the background and the image couldn't heal together. . . . The new exposure could not marry with the old one." Metaphors often say more than is intended. Photographic development resembled psychological growth, but in neither had the healing taken place that was needed for "marriage," or wholeness.